

THE FRANKLIN CANYON PROPERTY—
BACKBONE TRAIL PROPERTY
LAND EXCHANGE

ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT

PREPARED FOR
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE



OCTOBER 2004

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Section 1—Purpose of and Need for Action

Introduction

The National Park Service (NPS) Santa Monica Mountain National Recreation Area (SMMNRA) is proposing a land exchange between the NPS and the Mountains Recreation and Conservation Authority (MRCA), a joint powers agency of the Santa Monica Mountains Conservancy (a California state agency) and the Conejo and Rancho Simi Recreation and Park Districts. The NPS land (Franklin Canyon Property) is 1.07 acres; the MRCA land (Backbone Trail Property) is 30 acres. Both properties are within the SMMNRA.

This Environmental Assessment (EA) evaluates the no action alternative and one action alternative. The alternatives analyzed are:

- ◆ Alternative A: No Action
- ◆ Alternative B: Land Exchange.

Because of the small size and limited nature of the proposed project, no other alternatives were analyzed.

Purpose and Need

The purposes of this federal action are to further consolidate NPS lands in the SMMNRA in order to promote more comprehensive and efficient land management and protection and to dispose of disturbed lands containing a private road easement and not capable of being restored to natural conditions.

The primary need for the proposed action is to obtain 30 acres of land that provides the NPS with ownership and management control over a key segment of the Backbone Trail as presented in the SMMNRA Land Protection Plan (NPS 1984, most recent revision 1998). This control will allow greater operational efficiency and flexibility and provide better management and protection of natural resources along the trail corridor, which is consistent with the goals set forth in the General Management Plan for the Santa Monica Mountains National Recreation Area (NPS 2003). At the same time, NPS will convey a highly disturbed property in an urbanized area to the MRCA, which manages surrounding state and NPS lands and is more capable of managing the property's associated road easement and fire hazard issues.

Background and Project Area Location

The land to be acquired by the NPS is located along the Backbone Trail (NPS Tract Number 112-56; Los Angeles County Assessor Parcel Numbers 4472-005-026, 027, and 028). See Figure 1--Regional Map, Figure 2--Vicinity Map, Figure 3--Aerial Photograph and Figure 4--Land Ownership. The northeast portion of this 30 acre property contains a portion of the alignment of the Backbone Trail, which when completed will run the length of the Santa Monica Mountains. Little Sycamore Canyon Road runs through the eastern half of the property. The property is undeveloped and although showing past indications of disturbance, contains largely unbroken mixed-chaparral (Figure 3--Aerial Photograph). It is one of several properties in the area that the NPS is seeking to obtain in fee or protect by easement in order to complete the western Backbone Trail

SECTION I—PURPOSE OF AND NEED FOR ACTION

The land to be conveyed to the MRCA is located in lower Franklin Canyon. It is in the southwest corner of NPS Tract Number 163-06 and is described on maps of the County of Los Angeles as the westerly 57.63 feet of Lots 1, 2, and 3, Block 4, Track No. 6114 M.B. 88-18/23 and, portions of Lots 3, 4, 5, and 6 Block 2, TR 6114, M.B. 88-18/23 and a portion of Lot 5, Block 4, TR 6114, M.B. 88-18/23. See Figure 1--Regional Map, Figure 5--Vicinity Map, Figure 6--Aerial Photograph and Figure 7--Parcel Map. This 1.07 acre property contains a misaligned private road easement and portions of a mandatory fuel clearance zone around a private residence. (Figure 6--Aerial Photograph and Figure 7--Parcel Map). The land is highly disturbed with few native plant species and no archeological values.

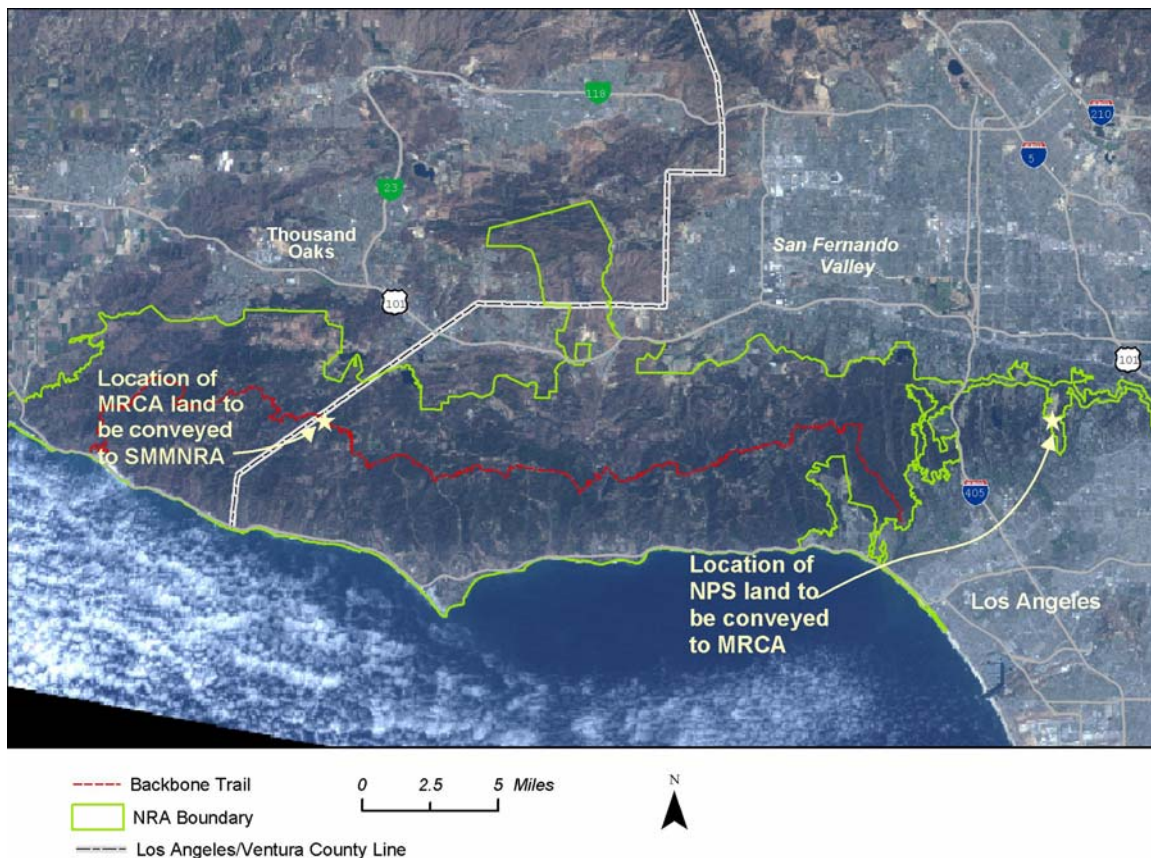


FIGURE 1—REGIONAL MAP

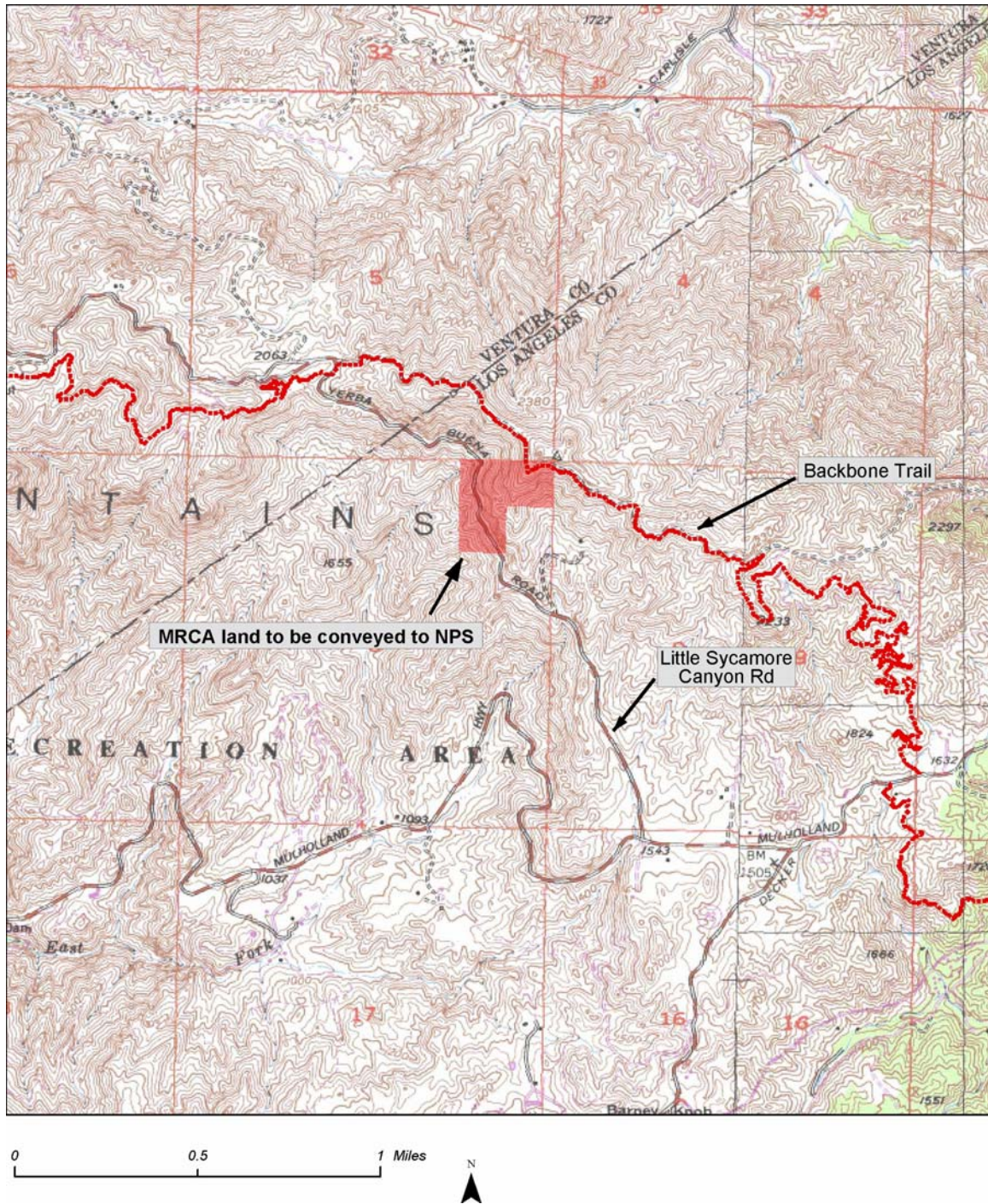


FIGURE 2—BACKBONE TRAIL VICINITY MAP



FIGURE 3—AERIAL PHOTO OF BACKBONE TRAIL PROPERTY PROPOSED FOR ACQUISITION

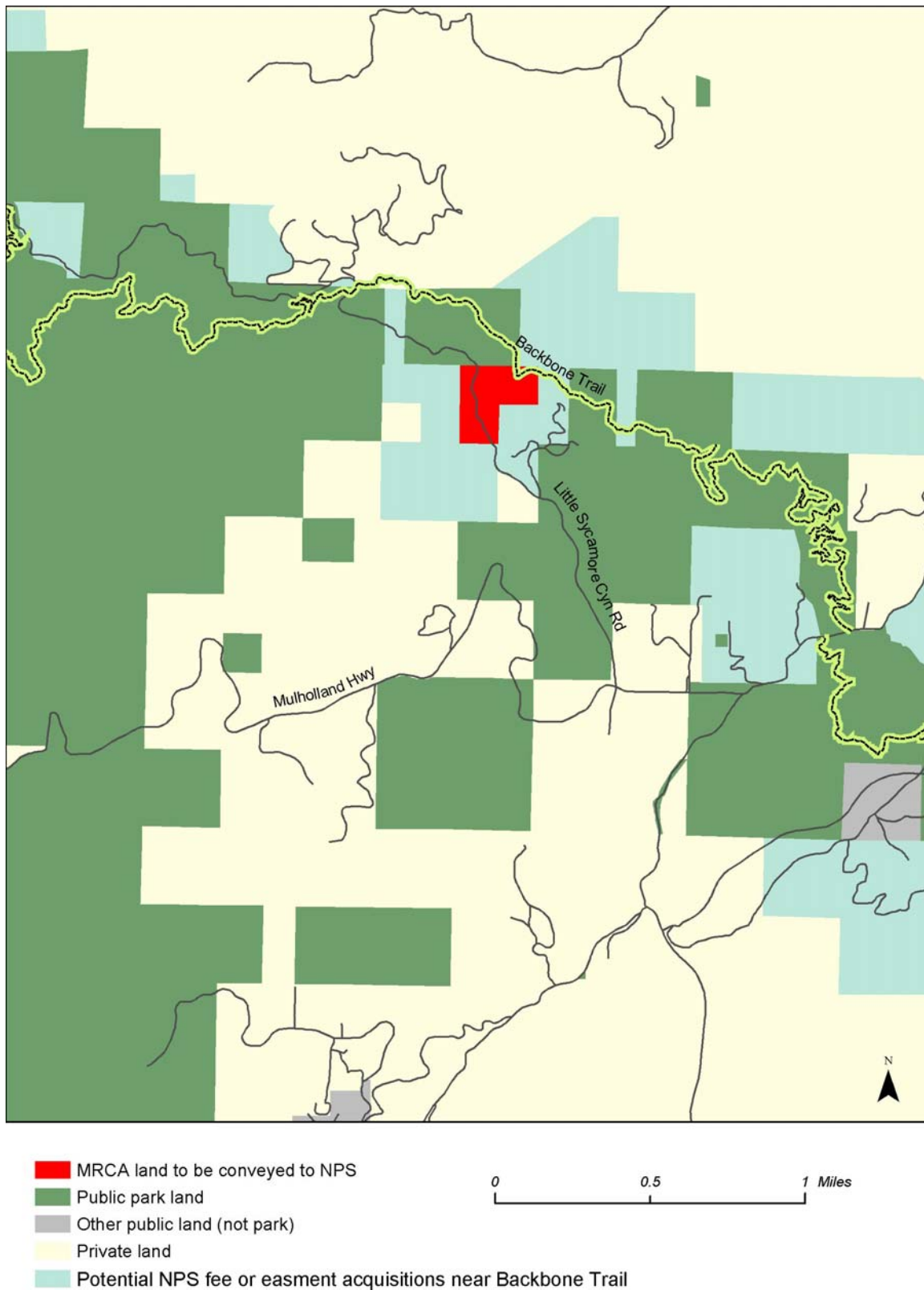


FIGURE 4—BACKBONE TRAIL PROPERTY TO BE ACQUIRED FROM MRCA WITH EXISTING PARKLAND AND OTHER PROPERTIES IDENTIFIED FOR POTENTIAL AQUITION

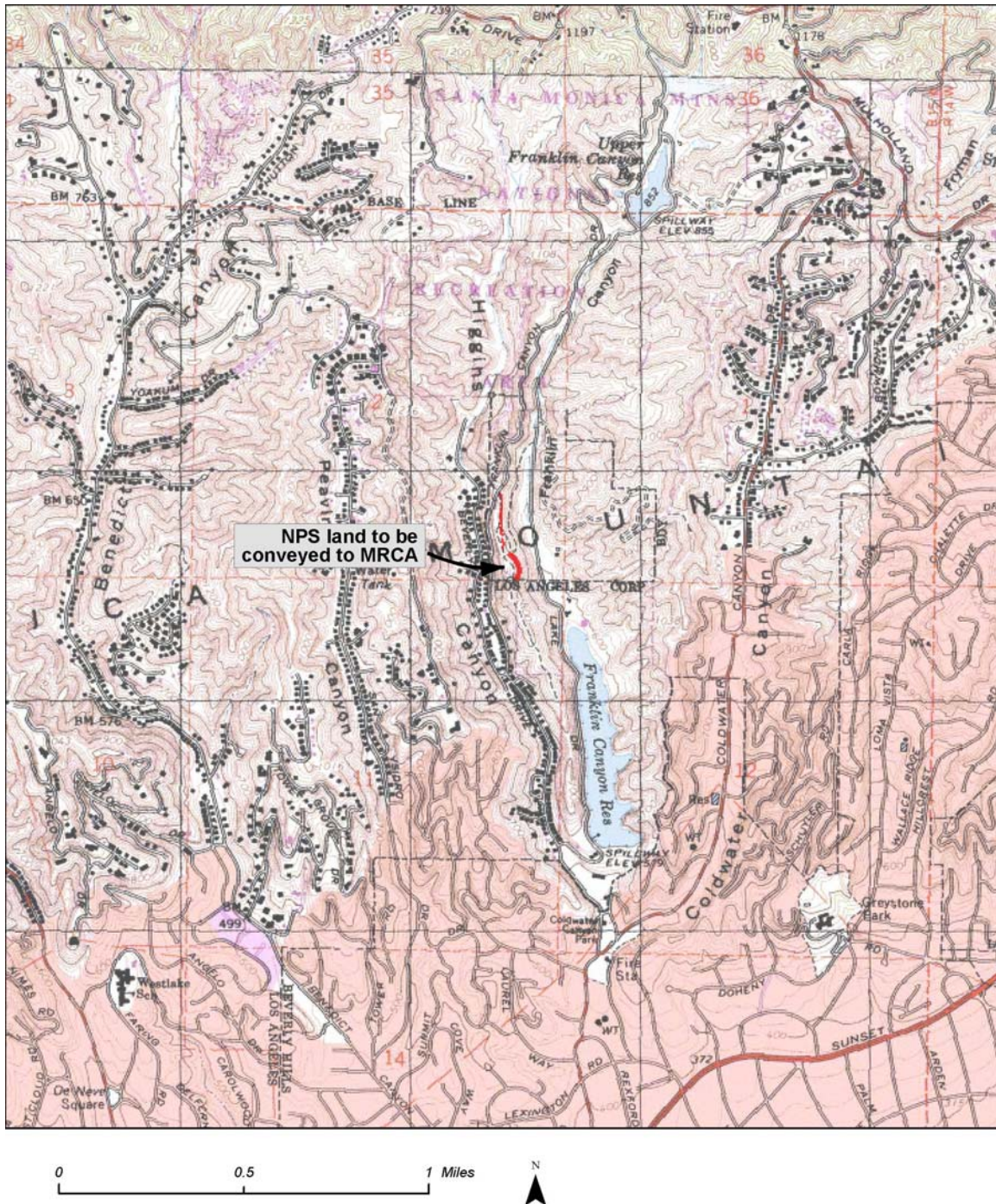


FIGURE 5—FRANKLIN CANYON VICINITY MAP



FIGURE 6—FRANKLIN CANYON PROPERTY TO BE CONVEYED TO MRCA
(Outlined in Red)

SECTION I—PURPOSE OF AND NEED FOR ACTION

PROPOSED PRIVATE ROAD WAY FOR ACCESSING PROPERTY OF ISAAC MORADI

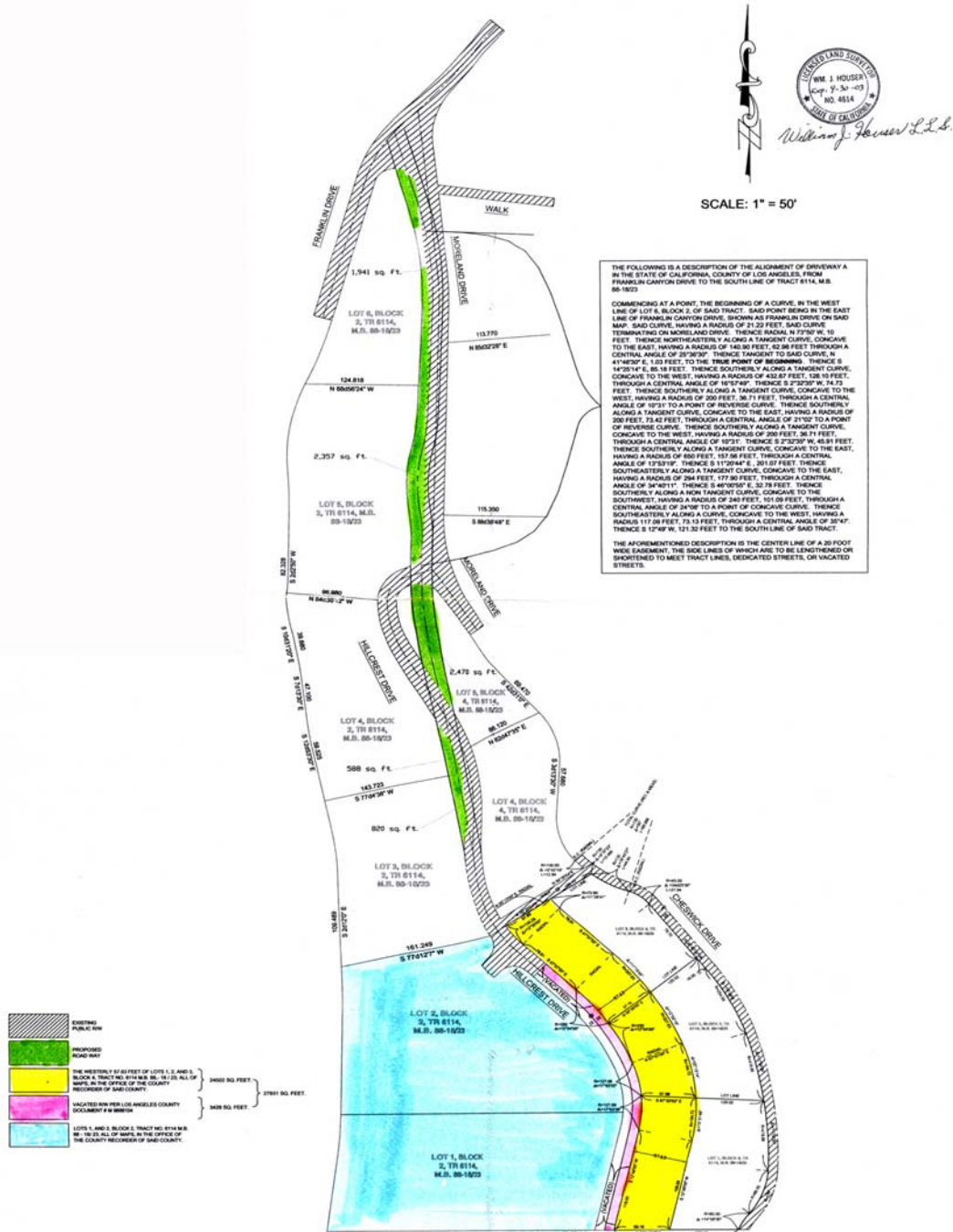


FIGURE 7—PARCEL MAP

Green = existing roadway.
Pink = roadway access as per existing maps.
Yellow = fuel modification and fire protection area.

Environmental Assessment

This EA analyzes the no-action alternative (Alternative A) and one Alternative (Alternative B) and their impacts on the human and natural environment. Alternative A is not to make the land exchange. Alternative B is for the NPS to exchange 1.07 acres of NPS land for 30 acres of MRCA land. This EA outlines project alternatives, describes existing conditions in the project area, and analyzes the effects of each project alternative on the environment. This EA has been prepared in accordance with the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) of 1969 and regulations of the Council on Environmental Quality (CEQ) (40 Code of Federal Regulations [CFR] 1508.9).

Related Legislation and Other Planning and Management Documents

The NPS Organic Act directs the NPS to manage units “to conserve the scenery and the natural and historic objects and the wildlife therein and to provide for the enjoyment of the same in such a manner as will leave them unimpaired for the enjoyment of future generations.” (16 U.S.C. § 1). Congress reiterated this mandate in the Redwood National Park Expansion Act of 1978 by stating that the NPS must conduct its actions in a manner that will ensure no “derogation of the values and purposes for which these various areas have been established, except as may have been or shall be directly and specifically provided by Congress.” (16 U.S.C. §1a-1). The Organic Act prohibits actions that permanently impair park resources unless a law directly and specifically allows for the acts. An action constitutes an impairment when its impacts “harm the integrity of park resources or values, including the opportunities that otherwise would be present for the enjoyment of those resources and values.” (Management Policies 2001, 1.4.3).

These policies also require the analysis of potential effects of each alternative to determine if actions would impair park resources. To determine impairment, the NPS must evaluate “the particular resources and values that would be affected; the severity, duration, and timing of the impact; the direct and indirect effects of the impact; and the cumulative effects of the impact in question and other impacts.” (1.4.4). The NPS must always seek ways to avoid or minimize, to the greatest degree practicable, adverse impacts on park resources and values. However, the laws do give the NPS management discretion to allow impacts to park resources and values when necessary and appropriate to fulfill the purposes of a park, as long as the impact does not constitute impairment to the affected resources and values (1.4.3).

The enabling legislation establishing the SMMNRA (1978) provides the following direction:

The Secretary [of the Interior] shall manage the recreation area in a manner which will preserve and enhance its scenic, natural, and historical setting and its public health value as an airshed for the Southern California metropolitan area while providing for the recreational and educational need of the visiting public.

Pursuant to the Government Performance and Results Act of 1993, the NPS adopted a mission statement for the recreation area in June 1997 that reaffirms the intentions of Congress stated in the enabling legislation. This mission statement is as follows:

The Santa Monica Mountains National Recreation Area exists to conserve for the Nation its best remaining example of an ever-rarer Mediterranean ecosystem, as well as its associated natural, cultural, scenic and historic resources, and to provide quality National Park experience for the diverse peoples of Southern

California. The park is a cooperative experiment in resource protection and environmental education with non-federal partners, whose success shall enhance the region's quality of life and provide lessons learned to other national park units increasingly challenged by the forces of urbanization.

The SMMNRA Land Protection Plan (NPS, 1984; most recent revision 1998) establishes as a priority acquisition of property and easement rights to extend the Backbone Trail west of Malibu Creek State Park. The plan states the following:

The [Backbone] trail is vital to serve a large number of recreation users and would serve as the main trunk of the mountains trail system, linking canyons, ridges, the ocean, and recreational use sites.

This trail corridor meets many critical purposes for public ownership as directed by the [park enabling] legislation. It connects existing state and local parks and National Park Service lands, protects existing scenic trail corridors, and allows the development of a hiking and equestrian trail.

Public recreation uses of three large state parks are enhanced by this acquisition because the protection of this link of the Backbone Trail corridor will allow trail construction and use by hikers and horseback riders. Because the trail will be continuous, accessible to urban areas, and available to the public, and because it traverses significant scenic features, it meets all criteria necessary to qualify as a National Recreation Trail.

The SMMNRA Land Protection Plan was revised in 1998. This revision brought focus to the benefits to the natural environment of obtaining land along the western Backbone Trail corridor. The revision established that in addition to containing a vital link in the regional trail network, this corridor provided vital habitat linking the large core habitats in major parklands to the east and west. The recreational and natural values of the lands along the Backbone Trail corridor and the priority to complete the trail and protect this corridor were affirmed in the SMMNRA General Management Plan and Environmental Impact Statement (NPS 2003).

The priority need to complete and protect the western Backbone Trail corridor identified by the NPS is supported in the Final Summary Report of the Santa Monica Mountains Area Recreational Trails Coordination Project (SMMART, 1997). This report was prepared by a consortium of representatives of state and local agencies, homeowner associations, interested private individuals, and trail-use and other organizations actively involved in trails and open space issues in the SMMNRA. This report provides a comprehensive valuation of trail priorities based on wide public interest and need. The Backbone Trail is established as vital to the regional trail system and completion of trail right-of-way acquisition and construction is identified as a high priority.

The NPS, MRCA, Santa Monica Mountains Conservancy and California Department of Parks and Recreation entered into a cooperative management agreement in 2001. In establishing the need for the agreement these parties concluded that:

...commitment of their respective resources...can enhance the common protection of all park resources, as well as the appropriate enjoyment and appreciation of the same by the public.

The agencies agreed to seek to attain cooperative operating procedures and practices that result in efficiencies and cost savings. The following two goals are included in the statement of work under this agreement:

Develop and employ, to the extent practicable, operating procedures and standards to ensure joint accomplishments of...activities, which may include but not be limited to: visitor protection and public safety, fire management, maintenance, design and construction, planning, signing and the development of policies.

Exchange operational responsibilities for parklands...when the parties of ownership and responsibility agree such exchange will result in more cost effective management and/or enhanced public services.

Issues and Impact Topics

Issues are related to potential environmental effects of project alternatives and were identified by the NPS project interdisciplinary team in their environmental screening list (June 2002). Once issues were identified, they were used to help formulate the alternatives and mitigation measures. Impact topics based on substantive issues, environmental statutes, regulations, and executive orders (EOs) were selected for detailed analysis. A summary of the impact topics and rationale for their inclusion or dismissal is given below.

Issues and Impact Topics Identified for Further Analysis

This EA is focused on the Franklin Canyon property (1.07 acres of land) that the NPS will exchange for the Backbone Trail Property (30 acres of MRCA land). Technical studies (cultural, biological, and hazardous waste-Phase I studies) were conducted on the NPS land while only a hazardous waste Phase I study was conducted on the Backbone Trail Property. The rationale is that NPS cannot dispose of property with significant natural or cultural resources and cannot acquire property that is impaired with hazardous waste. The following relevant impact topics are analyzed in the EA. Whether each issue is related to taking action or no action is specified.

Land Use – The proposed land to be conveyed by the NPS is at the south entrance to Franklin Canyon. It is adjacent to a public road and is currently used for access to private land and is mapped by the county for local vehicle access and vegetation modification for fire protection.

Soils and Landslide – The proposed land to be conveyed by the NPS has been disturbed by grading prior to NPS ownership and a roadway and unofficial trail exist on the property. Due to the slope of the land, erosion is a potential concern. The area is in a seismically active region, so landslides are a potential concern.

Vegetation, Wildlife, and Special Status Species—In a land exchange, the NPS must demonstrate that the land to be conveyed by the federal government does not have unique vegetation, wildlife, or special status species.

Cultural Resources—In a land exchange, the NPS must demonstrate that the land to be conveyed by the federal government does not have significant cultural and historic resources.

Public Safety—The proposed land to be conveyed by the NPS is in a high-potential wildfire zone. It also contains a currently misaligned road easement whose development along the actual easement alignment could result in an increased potential for a landslide.

Hazardous Waste—NPS cannot convey or receive properties with hazardous waste materials.

Recreation Resources and Visitor Use—An unofficial trail through the land (Franklin Canyon Property) to be conveyed by the NPS is currently being used by local residents and access to other portions of the park may be impacted.

Visual Resources—The land to be conveyed by the NPS is in the Franklin Canyon watershed and has topographic features visible to other areas of the park and adjacent neighborhoods.

Other Agency Land Use Plans or Policies—The Franklin Canyon Property is mapped by the county for local home access and fire protection.

Impact Topics Considered but Dismissed from Further Consideration

The following topics are not further addressed in this document because there are no potential effects to these resources or the topic does not apply to the project site.

- Adjacent Lands
- Air Quality
- Aquatic Life and Water Resources
- Designated Coastal Zones
- Designated Ecologically Significant or Critical Areas
- Energy
- Environmental Justice
- Floodplains
- Indian Trust Resources
- Noise
- Prime and Unique Agricultural Lands
- Sites on the US Department of the Interior's National Registry of Natural Landmarks
- Sole or Principal Drinking Water Aquifers
- Socioeconomic Resources
- Wetlands
- Wild or Scenic Rivers

In addition, there are no potential conflicts between the project and land use plans, policies, or controls (including state, local, or Native American) for the project area.

There are no potential effects to local or regional employment, occupation, income changes, or tax base as a result of this project. The project area of effect is not populated and, per EO 12898 on Environmental Justice, there are no potential effects on minorities, Native Americans, women, or the civil liberties (associated with age, race, creed, color, national origin, or sex) of any American citizen. No disproportionate high or adverse effects to minority populations or low-income populations are expected to occur as a result of implementing any alternative.

Public Scoping

Public scoping was not performed specifically for this land exchange. However, the purpose and need for this exchange was established in planning documents developed with substantial public scoping and comment. Issues of particular public concern identified during scoping of these documents that relevant to this land exchange are Land Use, Vegetation, Wildlife and Special Status Species, Cultural Resources, Recreation Resources and Visitor Use, and Visual Resources. Comprehensive public scoping during the development of the SMMNRA Land Protection Plan

SECTION I—PURPOSE OF AND NEED FOR ACTION

(1984) supported establishment of the priority for obtaining land to complete and protect the western Backbone Trail Corridor. Scoping and response to the draft SMMNRA General Management Plan (2002) reaffirmed the public desire for completion and protection of this corridor. The Santa Monica Mountains Recreational Trails Coordination Project, a publicly developed document to guide trail development in the park, also placed high priority on development of the Backbone Trail corridor as critical to the trail network in the mountains.

Section II—Description of Alternatives

Introduction

This section describes the alternatives considered, including the No Action Alternative. Due to the limited nature of the proposed project, there is only one project alternative and a no action alternative.

Alternative A- No Action—Under the no action alternative, NPS would not receive 30 acres in exchange for approximately one acre of isolated and disturbed land.

Alternative B- Land Exchange—As described in Section 1 of this EA, the SMMNRA proposes to exchange land with the MRCA. The Franklin Canyon Property will be exchanged for the Backbone Trail Property.

Permit Requirements

The land exchange documents and process between the NPS and MRCA will need to be completed.

Environmentally Preferred Alternative

The environmentally preferred alternative is the alternative that will promote NEPA, as expressed in Section 101 of NEPA. This alternative will satisfy the following requirements:

- ◆ Fulfill the responsibilities of each generation as trustee of the environment for succeeding generations;
- ◆ Assure for all generations safe, healthful, productive, and esthetically and culturally pleasing surroundings;
- ◆ Attain the widest range of beneficial uses of the environment without degradation, risk of health or safety, or other undesirable or unintended consequences;
- ◆ Preserve important historic, cultural, and natural aspects of our national heritage and maintain, wherever possible, an environment that supports diversity and variety of individual choice;
- ◆ Achieve a balance between population and resource use that will permit high standards of living and a wide sharing of life's amenities; and,
- ◆ Enhance the quality of renewable resources and approach the maximum attainable recycling of depletable resources.

Alternative B is the environmentally preferable alternative and the park's preferred alternative because overall it would best meet the requirements in Section 101 of NEPA and the goals of NPS. It would achieve these requirements by providing the NPS with 30 acres of high priority parkland for public use, turning over 1.07 acres of impacted land with a fuel modification zone and a road easement to a local agency better equipped to manage them.

Section III—Affected Environment

Franklin Canyon Property

Land Use—The Franklin Canyon Property is within the City of Los Angeles General Plan, which was adopted in 1974. Elements of the plan have been amended, resulting in various adoption dates for each element within the plan. The General Plan's land use element is broken down into community plans. The Franklin Canyon Property is within the *Bel Air—Beverly Crest Community Plan*, adopted in 1996. The current use of the property is for access to private property and an unofficial recreation trail.

Soils and Landslides—The Franklin Canyon Property comprises steep terrain at the edge of a narrow ridge. The elevation of the property is approximately 800 feet above sea level. Some of the property exceeds 50% slope. The predominant bedrock is granite, and the area is in an erosional environment. Disturbed soil on adjacent properties shows signs of erosion and landslides. There are no known active faults underlying the project site and therefore, the potential for fault rupture is considered low.

Franklin Canyon is not located within an Earthquake Fault Zone as referenced in Fault-Rupture Hazards Zones in California (Department of Conservation). However, it is located within a seismically active region and new development would be subject to ground shaking hazards associated with earthquake events on active faults and other faults throughout the region.

Vegetation, Wildlife, and Special Status Species—The project site consists of Parcel 1, a road, and Parcel 2, the upper edge of a hill. Parcel 1 contains no vegetation. Parcel 2 is covered by invasive species in a band to about 6' from the west property line at the north property (see Figure 8) line and increasing toward the south (see Figure 9) to cover most of the property in question. Below this is a diverse mix of sparse coastal sage scrub / mixed chaparral / oak woodland species. There are two *Quercus agrifolia* individuals, one with ~ 25' canopy and a sapling with ~ 5' canopy. Local wildlife includes mule deer (*Odocoileus*), raccoon (*Procyon lotor*), desert cottontail (*Sylvilagus auduboni*), coyote (*Canis latrans*), woodrat (*Neotoma* sp), and California ground squirrel (*Spermophilus beecheyi*). A field survey showed no habitat for threatened or endangered species (Appendix A) occur on the site.



**FIGURE 8—LOOKING WEST ALONG THE FRANKLIN CANYON PROPERTY
AND THE STEEPER PORTION OF THE 1.07 ACRES**



FIGURE 9—LOOKING NORTH ALONG THE FRANKLIN CANYON PROPERTY

Cultural Resources—Appendix B presents the results of the cultural resources study on the Franklin Canyon Property. This study presents the cultural background of the area, study method used to complete the work, results of the record search, results of the pedestrian survey, and management recommendation. A review of the records and reports on file at the South Central Coastal Information Center indicated that a total of six surveys or archaeological clearances were previously conducted within a study area comprising a one-mile-square zone around the Franklin Canyon Property. All of these studies were negative. Two of these studies included the Franklin Canyon Property and one of the studies included a pedestrian survey of the entire Franklin Canyon Property.

A pedestrian survey was conducted by ASM Associates on the entire Franklin Canyon Property (see Appendix B.). No cultural resources were found within the Franklin Canyon Property.

Public Safety—The Franklin Canyon Property is in a high potential wildfire zone. The dry vegetation, steep slopes, and the prevailing westerly wind create a high fire danger during the summer and fall seasons.

Hazardous Waste—A Level I Environmental Site Assessment Survey revealed no evidence of recognized environmental conditions in connection with the property. Based on the information obtained during the Level I Survey, there is no evidence that contaminants are present on this property, and there are no obvious signs of the effects of contamination. See Appendix C for Level I Pre-Acquisition Environmental Site Assessment Survey.

Recreation Resources and Visitor Use—The Franklin Canyon Property is used as an unofficial access point into the park.

Visual Resources—The property can be seen from other areas of the park. The visual character of the Franklin Canyon Property is defined by the existing road, disturbed soils, and modern trash scatters. In addition to the parkland, the adjacent lands are used for residential houses and reservoir and flood control.

Other Agency Land Use Plans or Policies—The property is mapped by the county for local access and fire modification zone.

Backbone Trail Property

Other than for hazardous waste, resource issues were not required to be investigated in detail for the Backbone Trail Property through this documentation process as explained in the “Issues and Impact Topics Identified for Further Analysis” section of this document. Acquisition of this property will result in increased protection of the natural, cultural and scenic resources and provide for better maintenance of the Backbone Trail, but will not otherwise alter the existing conditions on the property.

Land Use—The Backbone Trail Property lies in unincorporated Los Angeles County and is within the Los Angeles County Streamlined General Plan (1980, revised 1992). The property is on the boundary of areas covered by the Malibu Local Coastal Plan/Land Use Plan (1986) and the Santa Monica Mountains North Area Plan (2000). The northeast portion of this property contains a portion of the alignment of the Backbone Trail, which when completed will run the length of the Santa Monica Mountains. Little Sycamore Canyon Road runs through the eastern half of the property. There are two old roads / unofficial trails on the property that are not maintained and gradually filling in with vegetation. The property is undeveloped and although showing past indications of disturbance, contains largely unbroken mixed-chaparral. It is one of several properties in the area that the NPS is seeking to obtain in fee or protect by easement in order to

complete the western Backbone Trail. The property is currently managed as parkland by the Mountains Recreation and Conservation Authority.

Soils and Landslides—The Backbone Trail Property comprises moderate terrain covered with vegetation. Erosion potential is low to moderate. There are no known active faults underlying the project site and therefore, the potential for fault rupture is considered low.

The Backbone Trail Property is not located within an Earthquake Fault Zone as referenced in Fault-Rupture Hazards Zones in California (Department of Conservation). However, it is located within a seismically active region and subject to ground shaking hazards associated with earthquake events on active faults and other faults throughout the region.

Vegetation, Wildlife, and Special Status Species—The site contains a diverse, mixed chaparral dominated by big-pod ceanothus (*Ceanothus megacarpus*). The shrub canopy is closed except in small areas previously disturbed. No wildlife surveys were conducted for this assessment, but local wildlife known to use the site include mule deer (*Odocoileus*), raccoon (*Procyon lotor*), mountain lion (*Felis concolor*), bobcat (*Felis rufus*), coyote (*Canis latrans*), desert cottontail (*Sylvilagus auduboni*), woodrat (*Neotoma* sp), and California ground squirrel (*Spermophilus beecheyi*).

Cultural Resources—A cultural resource survey was not conducted for this site. No historic cultural resources exist on the property. The Santa Monica Mountains archeological site database shows no prehistoric sites on the property.

Public Safety—The Backbone Trail Property is in a high potential wildfire zone. The dry vegetation, steep slopes, and the prevailing westerly wind create a high fire danger during the summer and fall seasons. However, there is no nearby development that would be threatened in the event of a fire.

Hazardous Waste—A Level I Environmental Site Assessment Survey revealed no evidence of recognized environmental conditions in connection with the property. Based on the information obtained during the Level I Survey, there is no evidence that contaminants are present on this property, and there are no obvious signs of the effects of contamination (See Appendix C for the level I Pre-Acquisition Environmental Site Assessment Survey).

Recreation Resources and Visitor Use—The property contains a portion of the alignment of the Backbone Trail, a major trail used by hikers, cyclists and equestrians. Although off-trail hiking is permitted, the surrounding area is rarely entered by visitors. Visitors infrequently park along Little Sycamore Canyon Road in order to access the trail.

Visual Resources—The property can be seen from Little Sycamore Canyon Road and the Backbone Trail. The visual character is of natural vegetation.

Other Agency Land Use Plans or Policies—Both the Malibu Local Coastal Plan/Land Use Plan (1986) and the Santa Monica Mountains North Area Plan (2000) identify this property and adjoining areas for natural resource protection and recreational trail use. The property is currently managed as parkland by the MRCA. Responsibility for fire suppression is with the Los Angeles County Fire Department. There are no plans for fuel modification in this area.

Section IV—Environmental Consequences

Methodology for Evaluating Impacts

The following terminology is used to describe impacts and condition is common to all resource topics:

Type of Impact

Negative:	Moves the system away from the desired condition.
Positive:	Moves the system toward the desired condition.

Duration of Impact

Short-term	For one to three seasons (years)
Long-term:	Greater than three seasons and continuing indefinitely.

Intensity of Impact

No / Negligible:	Imperceptible or undetectable.
Minor:	Slightly perceptible and limited in extent.
Moderate:	Readily apparent but limited in extent.
Major:	Substantial, highly noticeable and affecting a large area.

Resource Condition

Disturbed:	Lacking in native vegetation and with soil profiles that have been disrupted by grading or filling.
Impairment:	Harm to the integrity of park resources or values, including the opportunity for enjoyment of those resources or values.
Significant effects:	Substantial or potentially substantial, adverse change in the physical conditions which exist within the area affected by a proposed project, including land, air, minerals, flora, fauna, noise and objects of historic or aesthetic significance (as per California Environmental Quality Act).

Potential impacts on each of the resource topics were predicted by the subject matter experts from NPS and UltraSystems using the best information available. Analysis and evaluation is generally qualitative, an approach deemed appropriate for the particular resource topics and impacts considered. Available vegetation, soils and cultural resource data were reviewed for the property to be acquired. Vegetation and cultural resource surveys were conducted on the property to be conveyed.

Preferred Alternative (Implement Land Exchange)

Franklin Canyon Property

Land Use—With the land exchange the Franklin Canyon Property will be used as it is currently being used, as a roadway to a private residence. There will be no impact to land use.

Soils and Landslides—With the land exchange, the Franklin Canyon Property will be used as it is currently being used, as a roadway to a private residence. However the conveyance of the land to the MRCA will provide the opportunity for realignment of an existing easement away from a geologically unstable slope. The preferred alternative will provide for better protection from landslides. There will be a moderate, long-term positive impact.

Vegetation, Wildlife, and Special Status Species—With the land exchange, the Franklin Canyon Property will be used as it is currently being used, as a roadway to a private residence. Existing invasive and natural vegetation will be modified by the MRCA for fire management. While some native vegetation would be reduced, flammable non-native vegetation would be removed and replaced with fire-safe natives. There will be a net minor, long-term positive impact to vegetation and no impact to wildlife or special status species.

Cultural Resources—The Franklin Canyon Property is a highly disturbed setting. A field survey was conducted and a record search was performed to determine the potential for archeological resources. (See Appendix B.) The resulting determination was that no prehistoric or historic cultural resources are present on the project site. There will be no impact to cultural resources.

Public Safety—With the land exchange, the Franklin Canyon Property will be modified by the MRCA for fire protection and flammable invasive species will be replaced with less flammable native California species. The preferred alternative will have a long-term, moderate positive impact on public safety.

Hazardous Waste—No hazardous materials are known to exist on the Franklin Canyon Property. The exchange would not result in a change in this condition. There would be no impacts.

Recreation Resources and Visitor Use – With the land exchange, the Franklin Canyon Property will be used as it is currently being used, as a roadway to a private residence. Hikers will still have access to the unofficial trail at the site. Visitor use will not be affected, impacts are negligible.

Visual Resources—Impacts of the proposed project would be considered significant if a visual condition is created that would substantially conflict with the visual character of the surrounding area. The proposed project would not change the existing use of the land; however the conveyance of the land to the MRCA will provide the opportunity for realignment of an existing road easement away from the edge of the hilltop and reduce the potential for negative impact to the vista from the parkland below the hill. There will be a potential long-term moderate positive impact to visual resources.

Other Agency Land Use Plans or Policies—With the land exchange, the Franklin Canyon Property will be used as it is currently being used, as a roadway to a private residence. Under a Memorandum of Agreement, the MRCA manages much of the NPS property in the Franklin Canyon. Conveyance of the road easement and associated fuel break to the MRCA will give that agency greater flexibility in managing two difficult land use issues in the area and relieve the NPS of the responsibility of management at a site remote from NPS facilities. Fire department access and fuel modification needs would be better met. The preferred alternative will improve implementation of land use plans and policies. There will be a long-term moderate positive impact.

Possible Connected Actions and Mitigation

The purpose of the MRCA in implementing this land exchange is to convey management responsibility for a remote parcel to the NPS and, by acquiring the Franklin Canyon Parcel from NPS, to increase the MRCA's ability to manage the road easement and brush clearance zone that occur on the property. Through a cooperative management agreement the MRCA currently provides patrols for enforcement of applicable laws and maintains the trail network on all NPS land within Franklin Canyon.

In addition to undertaking active management of the fuel modification zone, the MRCA intends to use the land obtained in Franklin Canyon to realign an existing road easement belonging to the adjoining landowner, which if exercised under its legal configuration would lead to substantial

construction and potential erosion impacts on the hillside overlooking the canyon. The MRCA has also expressed intent to link resolution of the easement alignment problem to limiting development on the adjoining property to the single residence that currently exists there.

Several management options for the property would be open to the MRCA including conducting a land exchange with the adjoining land owner. The MRCA has not determined what options they will pursue. However, under any management option the integrity of the surrounding parkland would be protected in that the MRCA must provide that all impacts resulting from their actions will have less than significant effects. The MRCA as a joint powers agency of two local recreation and park districts (Conejo and Rancho Simi) and a California state agency (the Santa Monica Mountains Conservancy) is bound the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA). This act requires that each public agency shall mitigate or avoid the significant effects on the environment of projects it approves or carries out whenever it is feasible to do so. (Chapter 1, § 21002.1(b)).

Backbone Trail Property

Land Use—Thirty acres of key trail corridor and viewshed will come under management and protection of the NPS. The goals for completing the Backbone Trail as expressed in the SMMNRA Land Protection Plan and General Management Plan will be furthered. The existing trail alignment will be maintained and natural vegetation protected through exotic species control and restoration of minor disturbance sites as found necessary. Under the preferred alternative maintenance of the Backbone Trail and management and protection of the surrounding vegetation will be increased over that currently provided. There will be a long-term, moderate positive impact.

Soils and Landslides—The site will remain undeveloped with the exception of the Backbone Trail and Little Sycamore Canyon Road. The ability to maintain the Backbone Trail would be improved and minor erosion reduced. There will be a long-term, minor positive impact on soils.

Vegetation, Wildlife, and Special Status Species—All vegetation and wildlife within the property will be protected from collection or harassment through federal laws and regulations. The site will be actively monitored by NPS rangers. Natural vegetation protected through exotic species control and restoration of minor disturbance sites as found necessary. There are no special status species on the site. Under the preferred alternative natural resources will receive a higher degree of protection than currently provided. There will be a long-term, moderate positive impact.

Cultural Resources—Archeological resources will receive protection under federal laws and regulations. There are no historic cultural resources on the site. The preferred alternative will not result in substantial change in protection of cultural resources. There will be no impact.

Public Safety—Under the preferred alternative, there will be no change in public safety. There will be no impact.

Hazardous Waste—No hazardous materials are known to exist on the Backbone Trail Property. With the land exchange, the NPS will not be accepting land that contains hazardous waste. There will be no impact.

Recreation Resources and Visitor Use—The NPS will be better able than the MRCA to manage and maintain the western Backbone Trail and its associated natural resources. Public use and enjoyment of the trail and surrounding area will be increased. There will be a long-term, moderate positive impact.

Visual Resources—Visual resources would remain largely unchanged. However acquisition of the property will provide increased protection of natural resources which if damaged would diminish visual resources. Exotic species control and restoration of minor disturbance sites would improve visual resources. There would be a long-term, minor positive impact.

Other Agency Land Use Plans or Policies—Acquisition of this parcel adjacent to NPS parcels and isolated from MRCA facilities will advance the goal set forward in the Memorandum of Understanding between the two agencies to work together to achieve greater efficiencies in park management throughout the SMMNRA. Local agency plans and policies would not be affected. There would be a long-term, moderate positive impact.

Summary of Environmental Consequences

The preferred alternative will provide for improved protection of natural, scenic and recreational resources along a key trail and surrounding natural vegetation corridor. It will serve to consolidate NPS holdings along the Backbone Trail, increase management flexibility and operational efficiency, and provide for improved natural resource and trail maintenance. In Franklin Canyon the preferred alternative will provide the opportunity for correction of a potentially damaging alignment of a road easement and turn management of the easement and an associated fuel management zone over to the local park agency headquartered in the canyon and more capable of managing these problems. Greater management efficiency will be achieved by both agencies. Given these benefits, long-term, moderate positive impacts are anticipated under the preferred alternative. No impairment of resources or values would occur.

No-Action Alternative (Do Not Implement Land Exchange)

Franklin Canyon Property

Land Use—Without the land exchange, the Franklin Canyon Property will be used as it is currently being used, as a roadway to a private residence. The no-action alternative will have no impacts to land use.

Soils and Landslides—Without the land exchange, the Franklin Canyon Property will be used as it is currently being used, as a roadway to a private residence. This roadway does not follow the existing legal alignment and technically encroaches on NPS land. Implementation of the legal alignment would require construction that is potentially damaging to hillside resources. Under the no action alternative an expedient opportunity to correct the alignment problem will be lost. There is potential for long-term, moderate negative impacts.

Vegetation, Wildlife, and Special Status Species—Without the land exchange, the Franklin Canyon Property will be used, as it is currently being used as a roadway to a private residence. The mostly non-native vegetation on the site will remain. There will be no impacts to existing vegetation, and no impacts to wildlife and special status species.

Cultural Resources—The Franklin Canyon Property is a highly disturbed setting. A field survey was conducted and a record search performed to determine the potential for archeological resources. The resulting determination was no prehistoric or historic cultural resources are present on the project site. There will be no impact to cultural resources.

Public Safety—Without the land exchange, the Franklin Canyon Property will not be modified for fire protection and flammable non-native species will not be replaced with less flammable native California species. There will be a long-term moderate impact on public safety.

Hazardous Waste—No hazardous materials are known to exist on the Franklin Canyon Property. There will be no impact.

Recreation Resources and Visitor Use—Without the land exchange, the Franklin Canyon Property will be used as it is currently being used, as a roadway to a private residence. The no-action alternative will have no impact on recreation resources and visitor use.

Visual Resources—Without the land exchange, the Franklin Canyon Property will be used as it is currently being used, as a roadway to a private residence. Exercise of the existing road easement will create visible development from the parkland below. There is a potential long-term, moderate impact to visual resources.

Other Agency Land Use Plans or Policies—Without the land exchange, the Franklin Canyon Property will be used as it is currently being used, as a roadway to a private residence.

Long-term Management—Without the land exchange, the Franklin Canyon Property will be used as it is currently being used as a roadway to a private residence inside the park gate. The NPS will continue to devote resources to managing a road easement and fire safety issues in an urbanized environment better suited for management by the MRCA. Operational efficiencies will not be achieved. The no-action alternative will negatively impact both agencies land use plans or policies directed towards operational efficiency. There will be a long-term moderate negative impact.

Backbone Trail Property

Land Use—Thirty acres of trail corridor and viewshed will remain under management and protection of the MRCA. The MRCA will maintain the site as parkland, but does not have the resources to maintain the trail alignment and protect the associated resources at this location. Efficiencies obtained through consolidation of properties will be lost. No short-term impact will occur to existing resources, but there is potential for a long-term, minor negative impact.

Soils and Landslides—The site will remain undeveloped with the exception of the Backbone Trail. Ability to maintain the Backbone Trail will be reduced with increased potential for erosion. The no-action alternative will have no short-term negative impacts on soils and landslides, but potentially will have a long-term minor negative impact.

Vegetation, Wildlife, and Special Status Species—All vegetation and wildlife within the property will receive a lower level of protection and management than would occur under NPS ownership. However, significant collection or harassment at the site is not anticipated. Under the no-action alternative natural resources are not anticipated to be impacted in the short-term, but there may be long-term, moderate negative impact.

Cultural Resources—Archeological resources will receive protection under state laws and regulations. There are no historic cultural resources on the site. The no-action alternative will not result in substantial change in protection of cultural resources. There will be no impact.

Public Safety—Under the no-action alternative, there will be no change in public safety. There will be no impact.

Hazardous Waste—No hazardous materials are known to exist on the Backbone Trail Property. There will be no impact.

Recreation Resources and Visitor Use – The property is remote from MRCA facilities. Management and maintenance of the western Backbone Trail and its associated natural resources will be made more difficult. Public use and enjoyment of the trail and surrounding area will be decreased. There will be a long-term, moderate negative impact.

Visual Resources—Coordinated management of visual resources will be made more difficult, although this is unlikely to have a significant effect on the viewshed. Under the no-action alternative there is a potential long-term, minor negative impact on visual resources.

Other Agency Land Use Plans or Policies—The goal set forward in the Memorandum of Understanding between the two agencies to work together to achieve greater efficiencies in park management throughout the SMMNRA will not be achieved. Under this alternative, agency operational efficiency will be decreased and each agency's ability to protect resources here and elsewhere reduced. There will be a long-term, moderate negative impact.

Summary of Environmental Consequences

Under the no action alternative natural, scenic and recreational resources along a key trail corridor will receive a lower level of protection and management. NPS holdings will not be consolidated and increased management flexibility and operational efficiency not realized. Improvement of natural resource and trail maintenance will not occur. In Franklin Canyon responsibility for management of a road easement and associated fuel management zone will remain with NPS. The opportunity will be lost to turn responsibility over to the local park agency headquartered in the canyon and more capable of managing these problems. Management flexibility would be reduced. Greater operational efficiency will not be achieved and each agency's ability to protect resources reduced. There will be a long-term, moderate negative impact with no potential for impairment of resources or values.

Section V—Coordination and Consultation

This environmental assessment is published on the Santa Monica Mountains National Recreation Area website (<http://www.nps.gov/samo>). Individuals and organizations can request paper or CD-ROM versions in writing, by phone, or by e-mail at the following addresses:

National Park Service
Division of Planning, Science and Resource Management Division
Santa Monica Mountains National Recreation Area
401 West Hillcrest Drive
Thousand Oaks, California 91360-4207
Att: John Tiszler

Phone: 805-370-2340 (John Tiszler)

E-mail: john_tiszler@nps.gov

Questions should be directed to John Tiszler. Formal comments on this environmental assessment must be in writing. Comments can be submitted by letter or e-mail to the above addresses or on-line at the National Park Service Planning, Environment and Public Comment website (<http://parkplanning.nps.gov>). After entering the site, select Santa Monica Mountains NRA under “Choose A Park.”

Notice of the availability of this environmental assessment for comment has been sent to the Los Angeles Times and the Los Angeles Daily News. Copies have been placed in the following libraries:

Los Angeles Public Library Branches:
Will and Ariel Durant (West Hollywood)
Studio City (Studio City)
West LA Regional Branch (Los Angeles)

Beverly Hills Public Library

County of Los Angeles Public Libraries:
Westlake Village Library
Malibu Public Library

Notice of the availability of this environmental assessment for comment has been sent to the following public officials, agencies, homeowner’s associations and organizations:

Public Officials

Henry A. Waxman, Congressman, 30th Congressional District
Zev Yaroslavsky, Los Angeles County Supervisor, Third District
Jack Weiss, City of Los Angeles Councilman, Fifth District

Los Angeles County Agencies:

Department of Public Works
Department of Regional Planning
Fire Department
Sheriff’s Department

Los Angeles City Agencies:

- City Planning Department
- Department of Public Works
- Department of Water and Power
- Fire Department
- Police Department

Homeowner's Associations

- North Beverly - Franklin Canyon Homeowners Association

Other Organizations:

- Resource Conservation District of the Santa Monica Mountains
- Santa Monica Mountains Conservancy
- William O. Douglas Outdoor Classroom / Sooky Goldman Nature Center

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Section VII—References

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